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SUBJECT: DROUGHT PERSISTS IN KENYA'S MAKUENI
DISTRICT

Summary

1. Rainfall amounts below historical averages continue to negatively affect residents in several Divisions of the Makueni District, Kenya. The lack of rain and ground water has impacted local livelihoods, public health and been responsible for a significant out migration. Poor management and negligent water conservation practices are compounding the problem. OFDA partners German Agro Action (GAA) and World Vision (WV) are effectively addressing water and sanitation needs in the District through construction and community education activities. The Humanitarian situation in general has changed little since the last OFDA visit to the District in March 2005. Stakeholders are hoping that the seasonal Short Rains (October ? December) will provide relief to the region. End Summary

Background

2. OFDA Regional Advisor visited OFDA supported GAA activities in the Kibwezi Division of Makueni on September 14-15; and WV projects in Kathonzweni Division on September 21-22. GAA received USD 500,000 from OFDA to construct 5 water catchment tanks at local primary schools and 2 shallow wells. In September, OFDA awarded WV USD 232,000 to increase access to clean water in the Kathonzweni Division through the construction and rehabilitation of shallow wells. Both interventions include community education components focused on water management, sanitation and conservation. During the visits, on site interviews were conducted with local residents, government officials, and the local Member of Parliament (MP).

Current Situation

3. Makueni District continues to be affected by inadequate rainfall. The recent Long Rains Assessment (conducted jointly by UN and GOK officials) found that more than 76 percent of the population in Makueni drinks untreated water, the average distance traveled to collect water was between 6-8 kilometers, and diarrhea disease was the areas major morbidity.

4. Although a fee-based government water pipeline serves communities along the main highway, the network does not extend to the majority of the outlying population. Traditional water points such as streams and ponds have all but dried up. Several primary schools visited had no dedicated water points and were dependent on contributions from student families for drinking and hygiene needs.

5. Little has changed from the last OFDA visit to the area in March 2005. There were few signs of government investment with respect to improving access to water. Government humanitarian interventions in Makueni are primarily food for work schemes targeting politically important constituencies. However, nutrition is not a concern in Makueni according to an August UNICEF assessment which found global acute malnutrition rates below 4 percent.

6. The conditions in the Kathonzweni Division of Makueni are best described as bone dry and there has been no significant rainfall for the last three years. Agricultural fields are barren, there is

little green vegetation to speak of, and the dirt tracts are covered with 3 inches of fine dust powder. Water for many of the residents of Kathonzwani comes from the Athi River which snakes through the region. The drought's impact on agriculture (areas main source of livelihood) has forced many head of household to migrate to Nairobi or surrounding cities in search of day labor.

17. Despite the fact that the water table is relatively high, there are few proper wells and families travel significant distances to collect water. Families interviewed reported spending 3-4 hours per day collecting water for household use, which detracts from using time for other productive pursuits (education, animal husbandry). Donkeys loaded with water containers are a constant site through out the Division. Wells that were visited were in disrepair and open to contamination from animals and people. Many of the children seen had obvious sanitation related skin diseases, and several children that should have been in school were helping mothers collect and transport water for the household. Livelihood generally depends on the sale of livestock or remittance payments.

OFDA Partners

18. OFDA supports GAA emergency activities promoting increased access to clean water. Five 50,000 liter water tanks have been constructed at primary schools in the Makindu and Kibwezi Divisions providing for more than 3,500 students. The tanks collect rainwater from the roofs of the adjacent schools. This scheme was chosen since the depth required for digging wells is cost prohibitive. All five of the water tanks had been completed, rain has already started to fall at some of the school locations, and the tanks seem to be functioning well. School officials were grateful for the assistance and optimistic that water collected will contribute to hygiene improvement.

19. Two shallow OFDA wells now completed are providing clean water to 300 families. High levels of community participation were evident at all project sites as indicated by the substantial material and labor support provided; and by the speed at which the structures were finished. Residents are maintaining the sites to ensure that interventions are sustainable beyond the current emergency.

110. Through partner World Vision, five shallow wells will be constructed or rehabilitated, and an existing community motorized system will be extended in the Kathonzwani Division. These interventions will provide clean water to more than 40,000 people and activities are expected to be completed in 6 months. World Vision has already identified staff, materials, and sensitized communities to the activity. Construction activities will be complimented with sanitation and conservation education that includes training for water point management.

Local Government

111. The District Water Commissioner for Makueni acknowledged the drought and discussed government intentions for providing assistance. Quality of existing water sources was a concern since the Athi River is polluted with heavy metals and other contaminants. District assessments found that more than 50 percent of the population traveled 10 kilometers to locate a water source. An estimated 71 percent of the population of Makueni lives below the poverty line and it is considered Kenya's second poorest District.

112. The Commissioner stressed the importance of community education and organization as a resolution of the current problem. He felt that although the government had money available to assist with expanding access to clean water, many of the affected communities did not have the capacity to manage or maintain a local water point. The Commissioner was aware of USAID/OFDA activities in the District and reiterated his support. The interventions fit well with national and local water policies and he was especially supportive of the community training components.

113. The local MP, Mr. Kivutha Kibwana, was coincidentally residing at the local hotel in Wote town. He acknowledged that improved access to clean water is a priority, was familiar with and confident in the capacity of OFDA implementation partners and

their relationships with local communities. He emphasized the need to strengthen community capacity to manage and sustain the international assistance provided. He is concerned about the flight of people from the area in search of livelihood opportunities and said he was working to fully exploit the local potential for agriculture as a resolution to the problem.

Conclusions

14. The field visits support the finding of the recent UN/GOK Long Rain Assessment that drought continues to affect residents in the Makueni District and access to clean water needs to be improved. During the visit, no notable increase in water related disease or malnutrition when compared to the OFDA visit last March was found.

15. Access to water in sufficient quantities (for personal, animal, and agricultural use) continues to be a major problem for rural populations in the Kathonzweni, Makindu and Kibwezi Divisions. The situation is most acute at primary schools and rural villages far from the government sponsored water pipeline located along the Mombassa Highway. The harvesting of rain water is a practical and cost effective response to providing water in southern Makueni communities due to the expense of digging wells or extending piped water from central government locations. Shallow well construction is appropriate in the eastern sections of the Makueni District due to the elevated water table.

16. GAA has done a good job implementing the current USAID/OFDA program. The construction of 5 water catchment tanks and two shallow wells have been completed ahead of schedule. Sanitation and water management education activities continue.

17. World Vision has implemented several successful programs in the District and is a capable USAID/OFDA partner. Government authorities have endorsed USAID/OFDA activities since they complement the national and local strategic water objectives. Community education and water management training will improve impact and promote sustainability of the identified projects.

18. Improved rains during the short rain season scheduled for October-December will increase the availability of water from natural water points and local water harvesting schemes, thus providing an exit opportunity for current USAID/OFDA activities.

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